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ON THE EASTERN SHORE.

CONSIDERING all sorts of possible vacation trips coastwise, into regions where good collecting-ground for the student of folk-lore might be had, we selected, this summer, the famous "Eastern Shore" of Chesapeake Bay. To the popular mind, the mention of that part of the world brings up only visions of terrapin and soft crabs, of unending peach-orchards, washed by the oyster-breeding waters of the Bay.

To the curious student of our national types, it is, however, a well-known fact that this same Eastern Shore of Maryland is a region hardly less peculiar and interesting than Miss Murfree's Tennessee Mountains, or Mr. Cable's Acadian Louisiana. Like the denizens of Cape Cod, and for the same reasons, that is, from their semi-isolated positions, their long-settled and somewhat homogeneous populations, and a certain pride in their local peculiarities, the dwellers in the peninsular counties of Maryland represent a totally diverse type from that of the people of the adjacent mainlands, from which they are respectively separated only by a few miles of much-navigated bay. It is a matter of familiar remark in Baltimore that one can pick out at sight an "Eastern-shore man" in the city streets. Yet we found on reaching the peninsula itself that, while the remark was true enough of the typical oysterman, or the dwellers in the more remote inland portions of the region, it could not by any means be applied to all. One meets fashionably dressed and cultured people, living in tasteful, even elegant homes, and the more substantial farmers throughout the portion of the Eastern Shore which we visited live in a most comfortable and hospitable fashion.

It was of course impossible, in little more than a fortnight's stay in this interesting region, to gather more than a specimen sheaf of the characteristic superstitions, and in this hasty collection I chose to concern myself for the most part with the beliefs and sayings of the colored people. Of course, no definite dividing-line can now be drawn between the superstitions held by the negroes and those of their white neighbors and employers, nor is it easy or even possible in many instances to ascertain the history of some interesting superstition, usage, or myth. Colored nurses and house-servants undoubtedly taught white children hosts of superstitions of African origin; while on the other hand the blacks, with their natural credulity and love of the mysterious, have been ready to treasure up every whimsy that they have heard from the whites. But without doubt many superstitious beliefs and customs of the negroes are peculiar to themselves. In individual cases I met with a shyness, or rather a stolid

reserve, that made it utterly impossible to elicit information concerning their folk-lore. But in general the colored farm-hands and servants with whom I talked seemed rather pleased than otherwise at the interest shown in their stories, and talked very freely as soon as they came to feel that sport was not being made of them. Even the production of pencil and block for note-taking did not seem to discompose the story-teller once fairly embarked in his relation of the marvels which he, or some equally credible witness, had seen and heard.

It is but fair to add that much of the rapidity and success of my collection depended upon the enthusiastic and intelligent coöperation of one of the members of the family with whom we boarded during our stay in Maryland.

I was not a little surprised to find how far back in the history of civilization one turns on entering into the state of mind of the country negro. The disorderly host of ghosts and spirits, the witchcraft, charms, spells, and conjuring against which Reginald Scot brought to bear the whole arsenal of his learning, in England in the sixteenth century, finds its counterpart here within a half-day's ride of one of our foremost American universities. I shall here insert a few examples taken somewhat at random from the collection of folk medicine, animal lore, songs, divinations, folk tales, ghost stories, and tales of witchcraft, numbering some two hundred items in all, gathered in less than a fortnight of available collecting-time.

My little son observed that nearly every colored man employed on the farm wore a narrow leather strap or thong fastened about one wrist or forearm, usually the right. I asked a boy of perhaps fifteen what was the object of these straps. He grinned in a very sober fashion, watching intently his bare feet, one great toe all the time scraping the floor of the piazza, and insisted that he knew nothing of the practice, though I am fully persuaded that at the very time he wore under his ragged shirt-sleeve such a strap on his own arm.

Further inquiry in other quarters, however, informed me that these leather straps are believed to give one strength, and are also efficacious in relieving rheumatism or a sprained wrist. Another common custom in Chestertown is wearing a leather string about the neck to prevent taking the whooping-cough when that epidemic is prevalent. The whites also to some extent use this prophylactic.

The most pleasing thing in our intercourse with the colored people was their singing. We were fortunate enough to be on the farm at the time of the wheat-threshing, and were greatly entertained by the singing of the hands after supper, as they gathered in the roomy kitchen or on the benches out-of-doors. It was most interesting to see the abandonment with which they swayed the whole body back

and forth, sometimes keeping time also with feet and hands as they sang. One of the men was at another time sent in to sing to me, when I had much difficulty in getting him to vocalize at all. He had a cold, was going to town in a few minutes, and so on. Evidently the surroundings were not favorable, and it was hard for him to sing away from his fellow-workmen and the familiar atmosphere of the kitchen. At length, however, he managed to get through with one characteristic selection, but when I suggested another, a favorite song among the men, he declined, saying that that was a song, and the church-members could not sing songs. "But would n't it be all right for you to sing it to me, Will?" "No, ma'am; it might be all right for anybody out in de fiel',¹ but ef you is tryin' to serve de Lord, ef you is in de fold, then you mus' only sing hymns, or what they call the sperichul songs." And this distinction between worldly songs and those that church-members might rightly sing I found to be carefully observed by the latter. The song or hymn that follows is a fair specimen of many to which we listened: it was often difficult to secure the words, as the enunciation of the singers was frequently indistinct, and so much was usually improvised that some of the longer songs were hardly ever sung twice alike:—

LAND OF CANAON.

Canaon, Canaon, 't is a my happy hom,
I 'm a huntin' fo' de lan' of Canaon.

Let a me tell you 'bout God himself;
Canaon is a my happy home.

I 'm huntin' fo' de lan' of Canaon,
'T is a my happy home.

My po' mother has gorn befo';
'T is a my happy home.

Canaon, Canaon, 't is a my happy home;
I 'm huntin' fo' de lan' of Canaon,
'T is a my happy home.

To show how indefinable was the quality which distinguishes the "sperichul songs" from the secular ones, I insert two fragments, the former overheard at a negro camp-meeting by a white minister of the Methodist denomination who had gone to the meeting with the hope of lending some assistance in the exercises, — a hope which the character of the proceedings soon dispelled. The latter selection was the only bit which I could secure of a song which all church-members refused to sing on account of its worldly character.

¹ Meaning evidently one of the world's people — not a church-member.

Jesus died for you an' me,
 Hang yo' bonnet on a tree ;
 Ef you want to save yo' soul,
 Get yo' bonnet with a pole.

Way down yander to de sunrise,
 The Devil thought he'd torture me ;
 He burnt down my ole apple tree,
 Way down yander to de sunrise.

Dancing, too, is considered a very wicked amusement for a church-member, although more than one of the colored people told me that it was no harm even for a "member" to dance if he did not "cross his feet." Rigid as are these people in regard to their amusements, very many of them, alas! are exceedingly lax in matters of greater moral import. For instance, it is by no means an unusual occurrence for either a man or woman to have at least two living wives or husbands, without having gone through with the form of a legal separation. A farm-laborer one day asked his employer for leave of absence, that he might attend the funeral of his first wife, remarking casually that he wanted to show her all the respect he could. He was at the time living with a second wife, for whom some years previously he had deserted the deceased woman.

A volume of ghost and witch tales could easily be gathered in this single locality, but I will not here occupy space with the narration of more than a single one of several which I recorded exactly as related to me.

"About two years ago, I reckon, an ole man died in the place whar I useter live.¹ He lef' a heap o' proputtly ter his heirs; the' was a right smart head o' childun, an' he give 'em ev'y one a farm, an the' was one mo' farm yit lef' over. 'T was a good farm, an' the house all furnished up, but no one did n' keer ter live thar, fer they all said the house was haanted. But one of the heirs, he said he did n' feel no way feared but he could lay that ghost, so's ter live thar. An' they tole him the farm was his ef he could lay the ghost. So he went ter a man of the name of Peacock, that lived neighbor ter him, an' 't was a church-member, an' offered him a heap o' money ter go an' lay that ghost. Mr. Peacock he went that same night ter the house, takin' his Bible along, an' he set thar a readin' it backwards an' forwards; he did n' mind none whether the ghost come a-nigh or not.² Sho nuff the ghost come along while he was a-readin',

¹ The dialect of this story, though not that of the ordinary efforts to reproduce the talk of the Virginia or Maryland negro, is at least an attempt at a facsimile of what I heard. Many words are variously pronounced by the same speaker at different times. The sound of the preposition *to* may best be compared to that of the French *e* in *de*; there is no sound of *r* in it, though I have spelled it *ter*.

² Reading the Bible backward is supposed to prevent ghosts from entering; reading it forward, to keep them (if already in the house) from harming one.

an' it went all about thoo the house, so's Mr. Peacock could hear it goin' inter the diffunt rooms an' a-movin' things this-a-way an' that-a-way. But he did n' let on ter heah the ghost, no indeed, but he kep' a-readin' away ter his Bible. Atter a while, the ghost blowed out his lamp, but he jes lit it an' read on 'n' then he went inter the bedroom an' lay down. That sorter made the ghost mad, so's it come inter the bedroom, an' he see it like as ef 't was an ole woman. Fer the' was an ole woman's ghost that haanted the house anyhow; they said it could n' res' nohow 'count o' the murder the ole lady done whilst she was alive. Anyhow Mr. Peacock see her reach out her arm, long an' skinny-like, under the bed, 'n' she jes' turned it over so¹ with him on it. But he on'y crep' out fum under it 'n' went back inter the kitchen an' begun ter read away in his Bible. An' thar he stayed all night, on'y afore day the ghost come once mo' 'n' said, 'Ef yo' come back yer again, yo're a dead man.'

"Well, nex' night Mr. Peacock come back again, yes indeed, and he'd got two preachers ter come, too, 'n' try ter lay that ghost. One was a Methodis' 'n' the other was a Catholic, an' they both brought their Bibles, 'n' all of 'em kep' a-readin' forward 'n' backward. 'T wan't no time at all tell that ghost came again, an' then it jes' went on mos' outrageous. The Methodis', he didn' stay ter hear much o' the racket tell out he run, an' never come back that night. The Catholic, he held out a good bit, but 'fore long *he* run an' lef' Peacock ter stay it out by himself.

"Well, they say the ghost never spoke ter him no mo', but sho' 'nuff, in the mornin', thar was Peacock a-lyin' dead, with his head cut clean off, — yes indeed, sir! — an' the' ain't no one never tried ter lay that ghost sence."

A unique bit of animal lore is that a jaybird is never to be seen on Friday, as these birds are always engaged on that day in carrying wood to the Devil.

The Chestertown negroes say that this bird makes a trip to hell every third day. According to the lore of these people, the jaybird plays much the same part in the infernal regions that Mercury did among the Olympian deities, as he is reported to carry messages to his satanic majesty whenever any one on the earth yields to temptation or commits a sin. One of the colored people explained to me in some detail the method of this messenger: "Why, s'pose, mam, that somebody comes 'long an' asks you ter go ter a dance, an' you's a church-member an' knows you ought n't ter go: you say, 'No, guess I better not go,' but t'other feller says, 'Oh, come go 'long, it's no harm goin' down standin' lookin' on; you need n't dance yourself;' and you say, 'Maybe thar'll be drinkin' too;' an' he'll say,

¹ With a graphic imitation of the ghost's action.

'Oh, maybe they 'll have liquor thar, but you need n't take none; it's no harm standin' by and watchin' the rest enjoyin' themselves.' So by and by you go 'long with the other feller an' go ter the dance. When you git thar somebody says ter you, 'Come an' take a step now;' an' you think, 'Well 't won't do no harm just ter take a few steps on the flo' with the res''; 'n' befo' you know what yo' 're about yo' 're out dancin' with all the rest of 'em. Pretty soon some feller 'll come 'long an' 'll say, 'Won't you have a drink?' an' you think, 'Well 't won't do no harm just ter take a sip if you don't drink too much;' so maybe you 'll go an' drink a whole glass o' liquor, an' all the time you were doin' these things, which no Christian oughter do, ef you only knowed it, thar's Mista' Jaybird sittin' outside the winder a' peekin' in at you; all the time he's been listenin' ter ev'y word 'n' watchin' ev'ything you do, an' when he sees you've yielded ter temptation he flies right back ter the bad place and tells the good news ter his master, the Devil."

The jaybird not only is accredited with this malevolent disposition, but with great wisdom and cunning. Here is a very brief animal folk tale:—

"The jaybird made him a house all nice and comfortable, but the buzzard did n't have none. One col' winter mornin' on a Friday, as the jaybird was a' goin' ter the bad place, he saw Mista' Buzzard a-sittin' on a bare branch of a dead tree all huddled up with the col'. Jaybird said, 'Good-mornin', Mista Buzzard.'

"Mista' Buzzard did n't answer.

"'Mhm!¹ all summa' a-ridin' roun' with yo' pink-white shirt on an' stiff standin' collar an' — Good Gawd!'"

A young woman from Quaker Neck, Kent County, in good faith gave me the following love-divination:—

One or more girls place some eggs to roast before an open fire, while they seat themselves in front of the fire on chairs. Each one who is trying her fortune rises to turn her egg when it begins to sweat; it will sweat blood!

As she is turning the egg the person she is to marry will enter through a door or window (all of which must be left open) and take her vacant chair. If she is to die before she marries, two black dogs will enter, bearing her coffin, which they will deposit on her chair.

Mrs. Fanny D. Bergen.

¹ A peculiar, sarcastic exclamation, delivered with an extraordinary circumflex inflection.